DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 270 794 CS 209 872

AUTHOR Jeter, James Phillip
TITLE Black Press Commentary on the Japanese Internment during World War II.
PUB DATE Aug 86
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (69th, Norman, OK, August 3-6, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Businesses; Content Analysis; Discriminatory Legislation; *Japanese Americans; *Media Research; National Security; *Newspapers; *Press Opinion
IDENTIFIERS *Japanese Relocation Camps; World War II

ABSTRACT

A study examined contemporary reactions of the Black American press to the relocation and internment of the Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II. Noting that the Black American press has been an activist press since its inception in 1827, it was hypothesized that Black newspapers would editorialize against the internment of Japanese American citizens because the evacuation and internment was in violation of their civil rights. All issues (114) of six Black weekly newspapers published between the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the end of April 1945 were examined with special attention paid to the editorial and opinion columns. The results indicated that two papers contained no references to the Japanese internment. A third paper contained one veiled reference to the imminent internment of the Japanese. Two other papers contained columns vigorously objecting to the internment. Finally, the sixth paper, on the whole, objected to the internment, but also ran editorials encouraging Blacks to "return to the farm" and replace the Japanese in the coastal agricultural endeavors if their internment was inevitable. All of the papers were consistent in their protest of racial discrimination where they thought it existed and manifested itself, whether the Japanese internment was mentioned specifically or not. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Minorities and Communication Division

ED270794

BLACK PRESS COMMENTARY ON THE JAPANESE INTERNMENT DURING WORLD WAR II

James Phillip Jeter

Division of Journalism
Florida A&M University
Tallahassee, FL 32307

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Presented to the Minorities and Communication Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Convention
Oklahoma University, Norman, Oklahoma
August 1986

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

James Phillip Jeter

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 209872

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Black Press Editorial Commentary on the Japanese Internment

During World War II

According to President Franklin Roosevelt, December 7, 1941--the day of the Japanese bombing of the American naval base at Pearl Harbor-- was "a date that will live in infamy." One of the most cataclysmic events of all time, World War II was full of important dates. One of those dates was February 19, 1942.

On that day President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. Its chief provision authorized the designation of "military areas" from which all persons who did not have permission to enter and remain to be excluded or evacuated as a military necessity. It was the basis used for the policy of placing more than 120,000 Japanese persons--most of whom were either American citizens, women and children--in what amounted to concentration camps.

Most historians agree this order was a landmark travesty of justice and civil liberties. Cushman described the order as "the most alarming use of executive military authority in our nation's history."[1] According to Emery,

> "The greatest invasion of civil liberties(in modern war) took place when the Japanese living in the United States, including many American citizens of Japanese ancestry, were rounded up and kept in what amounted to protective custody in isolated camps during the early years of the war."[2]

This action took place even though investigations by federal

intelligence agencies indicated the Japanese living in America posed no substantial threat to national security.[3] The fact that persons of Japanese ancestry were the only ones evacuated and interned (Italian and German nationals and citizens of such ancestry were not) injected the element of racism into the practice. Michener wrote,

> "...of those interned some 73 percent were American citizens, born in this country and entitled to the full protection of our laws. These citizens were imprisoned for no reason other than their race."[4]

According to Eugene Rostow, "One hundred thousand persons were sent to concentration camps on a record which wouldn't support a conviction for stealing a dog."[5] In his memoirs, Francis Biddle--the Attorney General for the United States at the time-- wrote:

> "American citizens of Japanese origin were not even handled like aliens of other enemy nationalities--Germans and Italians--on a selective basis , but as untouchables, a group who could not be trusted and had to be shut up only because they were of Japanese descent..."[6]

The evacuation and internment of Japanese were carried out under the direction of persons in policy making positions such as Hugo Black, Tom Clark, Milton Eisenhower, Abe Fortas, John J. McCloy, Henry Stimson and Earl Warren.[7]

The time frame for this episode in American history was swift and concise. Approximately three months passed between the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the relocation of the first group of Japanese evacuees to the Manzanar Center in California's Owens Valley in March..

A review of the literature indicates a paucity of research on contemporary media reaction, opinion or stance on this story. Most of the books written on the subject have the benefit of hindsight with the luxury of having been written years after evacuation and internment took place. The most widely cited journals of communication research contain little information on this subject.[8] This article attempts to examine on aspect of this question. Specifically, what was the black press reaction to the relocation and internment of the Japanese in America during World War II?

Rationale

The black press in America has been an activist press since its inception in 1827. Initially, its major goal.was the abolition of the institution of slavery. Since the Civil War, a chief goal has been to point out perceived injustices against black people and to urge that America end discriminatory practices against black persons. Over the years, the black press practiced a brand of journalism that was totally committed to a cause and World War II was no exception. As Wolseley wrote, "During WW II the black press was admittedly biased and made no pretensions of objectivity when it came to the need for equitable treatment of blacks."[9]

Thus, one would speculate that with such a history the black press in America would editorialize against the internment of Japanese citizens because the evacuation and internment was a violation of their civil rights. Was this the case?

Method

In an attempt to answer this question, the author, utilizing the microfilm holdings in the Schomburg Collection of the New York City Public Library, examined editions of the black newspapers with the largest

national circulation during the early days of World War II and in one key geographic area--the West. The West was chosen because of several reasons. One, most of the Japanese citizens and nationals subjected to internment were from the Pacific Coast states of California, Oregon and Washington. Second, the "military areas" were all located on the West Coast. Finally, since the West was the area most affected; an area, local or regional point of view was sought.

The newspapers examined were the: Afro-American, New York Amsterdam Star-News, Chicago Defender, Norfolk Journal and Guide, Pittsburgh Courier and California Eagle--all weeklies. All issues between the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the end of April 1945 were examined with special attention paid to the editorial and opinion columns. A total of 114 editions were examined.

Findings

The biggest news story of the forties was World War II and this was reflected in the cartoons, editorials and columns appearing in the black newspapers as well. The author found the newspapers under study took different stylistic approaches in carrying out their editorial function. For example, some papers like the Amsterdam Star-News tended to have a number of short editorials on a variety of subjects in each issue while some papers like the Journal & Guide and Eagle tended to publish longer editorials on a single subject. The author found no editorial, cartoon or column in any issue of the publications between the bombing of Pearl Harbor to the issuance of Executive Order 9066 calling for the internment of Japanese nationals and Japanese-American citizens.

Afro-American

The Afro-American ran 83 editorials and cartoons during the four

month period. While none of the material called for internment, none protested it directly. There was one column by Ralph Matthews who referred to the situation of interned Japanese as a "plight" and suggested a similar fate would have befallen black leaders and spokesmen if Liberia were an attacker of the United States.[10]

Chicago Defender

The Chicago Defender ran approximately 170 editorials. cartoons and columns during the four month period under examination. Like the Afro-American and the Journal & Guide, it contained no such material for or against internment. However, the general tenor of the material appearing on the editorial pages called for equality, fair play and no discrimination in the war effort.

Journal & Guide

Much like the Afro-American, the Norfolk Journal & Guide, carried no editorials, cartoons or columns directly protesting the internment of the Japanese. Over this period, the Journal & Guide's 89 items on its editorial page argued for a color blind society and was not willing to brook any suggestion of the lack of black patriotism. Although never mentioned directly, perhaps a February 28 column by J. Thomas Newsome contains a veiled reference to the imminent internment of the Japanese. Newsome wrote:

> "No man suspects the Negro of sabotage. He needs no watching. He is dependable and trustworthy. Can the same be said of all white men?
>
> "It has come to this: We shall either have to be a democracy functioning wholeheartedly for the freedom of the masses or we shall have forced upon us a government

> that denies to the citizen individual rights and gives to the government absolute control over his body."[11]

Amsterdam Star-News

During this four month period, the Amsterdam Star-News ran 215 editorials, cartoons and columns-- most of which dealt with the war. This newspaper did not call for internment of the Japanese and ran one column which lodged a vigorous protest against the policy and its implementation. The column, written by Roy Wilkins--who would later become executive director of the NAACP-- called the maneuver "dangerous", "strange", discriminatory and a violation of basic rights.[12] In a column in the April 25 edition, Wilkins wrote:

> "....the steps which have been taken to move thousands of Japanese American citizens from their homes into virtual concentration camps do not reassure thoughtful Americans who love this democratic ideal of ours above all else." [13]

Wilkins decried the logic of a policy which resulted in Japanese American internment but not that of German or Italian Americans and argued that race alone must be the answer. He concluded:

> "The dangerous aspect of this move is that if the Government can confine Americans citizens of Japanese descent, it can confine American citizens who are Negroes, or of Mexican or Brazilian or British West Indian or African descent. Does it mean anything to be an American citizen?" [14]

Pittsburgh Courier

The Pittsburgh Courier carried 154 editorials,cartoons and columns during the time under examination. Three of these items--two columns and

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

an editorial-- were about Japanese internment. The columns, both written by George Schuyler, were published approximately four months apart--the first on December 20 and the second on April 25. In the former, Schuyler wrote, "The Japanese-Americans are overwhelmingly loyal, but they have always borne the burden of white American suspicion,and that burden will increase. Thousands may be penned in camps." [15]

The April 25 column was more pointed. Written after relocations and evacuations had begun, Schuyler was less benign in his attitude. He referred to the relocation and internment of the Japanese as "an inexcusable, indefensible, revengeful and racially-prejudiced policy."[16] He called the internment a "scheme" devised by "shiftless and incompetent white people" jealous of Japanese economic efficiency designed to grab Japanese holdings and sounded a theme found in the Wilkins' column:

> "These Japanese Americans are no more danger to the United States than are Italian-Americans, German-Americans, Franco-Americans, Russian-Americans or any other native-born white hyphenated groups. Indeed, less so because it is more difficult for them to be subversive." [17]

The one editorial,which ran in the Courier on April 4, was equally as scathing. It began:

> "With sinister and suspicious unanimity the daily newspapers and radio commentators of the United States have maintained silence on the dangerous violation of the Constitution in California where thousands of native-born American citizens have been deported from their homes on the ground that

they might commit a crime against the nation."[18]

The editors called the relocation and internment "ridiculous" and argued the policy was "a dangerous precedent" which violated the Fourth, Sixth and Eighth Amendments.[19] The editorial continued:

> "To tear thousands of citizens away from their homes, work and businesses on so flimsy a charge as the possibility that they MIGHT commit a crime is as high handed a procedure as Hitler's deportation of Jews and liberals or Stalin's deportation of so-called Kaluks or America's previous deportation of Indians."
>
> "Worse, this is the application of racial theory of government, since there is no move to deport from coastal regions those native-born citizens whose ancestors came from Germany or Italy -- the other members of the Axis-- doubtless because they are white.
>
> "Today it is only citizens of Japanese ancestry who are being deported, but with the precedent now established, what assurance has ANY(sic) citizen that he will not be summarily deported to distant countries on the shallow pretense that he might commit a crime?"[20]

Like Schuyler and Wilkins, the editors of the Courier agreed the Roosevelt Administration had the right and duty to deal with enemy aliens but only in individual cases where there was proof or, at the very least, specific charges.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

California Eagle

The author was able to review 19 editions of this paper which carried 51 editorials. Two of the editorials were specifically about the Japanese internment and contained a decidedly local perspective. The editorials-- on February 12 and April 30--both said the Japanese internment was an opportunity for black agricultural entrepreneurship. The February 12 editorial, several days after the announcement of Executive Order 9066, ran 12 paragraphs. The editor wrote of how blacks had squandered opportunities in agriculture in the past and urged blacks to not do the same thing again. The editorial reads:

> "...today, Negroes once again are faced with a tremendous agricultural opportunity, and once again these columns throb with the old cry, 'Back to the Farm(sic)!'"
>
> "Today's opportunity may be seen on the front page of your morning newspaper: "U.S. (to) Remove Aliens From West Coast Area."
>
> "It is well known that the Japanese people have become masters of the soil throughout our great state. With unflagging industry and determination, these people have built here an arian empire that is tremendous. If it must be lost to them, why shouldn't it fall into our hands." [21]

The editorial went on to detail a plan for achieving the goal through quick land purchases, black unity and the utilization of the expertise found at black colleges and universities in the South.

Apparently, the plan met with little enthusiasm or action by blacks for the paper ran a second editorial of 13 paragraphs on April 30. Under the title,"Back to the Farm--Again, Yes!", the editorial decried a perceived attitude of blacks which equated success with the professional life of a lawyer, doctor, preacher or teacher which was resulting in a missed "golden opportunity." This editorial reads, in part:

> "Penniless Oriental immigrants, shorn of the Negroes' anti-farm complex, moved in to found a flourishing agricultural empire. Students of the soil for generations, they easily adapted themselves to the demands of California's virgin lands.
>
> "So much for history. Today, once again, the columns of this newspaper are shouting "Back to the farm!" And for the first time in some forty years, that cry may have some immediate, practical results. Japanese evacuation is the subject of headlines in all our newspapers. The details of this mighty displacement are no news (now). The opportunities open to colored people are fairly obvious."[22]

Discussion

The comments of Westbrook Pegler notwithstanding, it could hardly be said that the black press of World War II was in the hands of communists.[23] In a profile of most of the major black owners and publishers, Ebony

magazine called them "a group of arch-conservatives in their thinking on every public issue with one exception--the race problem."[24]

As the excerpts from the newspapers examined indicated, the major black newspapers saw the Japanese internment as another vestige of the race problem in America and commented strongly, when they did, against the practice. Even Schuyler, a well-known black conservative, was opposed to the government's policy. It should be noted the only editorial, not a column, opposing the internment was found in the Pittsburgh Courier which had the largest circulation of any black newspaper during this period. The paper also routinely carried the Schuyler column, albeit with a disclaimer.

It is also interesting to note that the two newspapers-- the Courier and the Eagle-- which according to the evidence presented on previous pages, were the most active and vocal on the subject were two of the black newspapers harassed by the federal government during World War II for their scathing editorials against federal wartime policy.[25]

Moreover, the author would not want the reader to get the wrong impression of the California Eagle and its position on the internment of Japanese. Although the two editorials found in the paper during this period might tend to give the impression the Eagle supported internment for the purposes of a black land/property grab, a closer examination of the newspaper indicates this was not the case.

Because this was a local story for the Eagle, there were many more items about the internment not found on the editorial page. One such item is very illuminating and perhaps casts the paper in a different light.

The Eagle's January 1 edition contained a story about a statement received from the Japanese-American Citizens League of Southern California

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

(representing some 40,000 Japanese-American citizens)in which the Japanese pledged loyalty to the United States of America. This front page story concluded with these two paragraphs:

> "Having received this expression of loyalty from the representatives of the American citizens of Japanese ancestry, we urge all people of our great country to adopt an attitude of friendliness, sympathy and courtesy toward all Japanese.
>
> "If there are any subversive individuals in the Japanese community, the F.B.I.(sic) and other law enforcement agencies will take care of them. Our people, therefore, should continue their normal relations in schools, in business and in our social groups with the Japanese residents of our communities."[26]

Since this was written more than one month prior to the issuance of Executive Order 9066 and more than two months before the evacuations began, it is reasonable to infer that the Eagle was not among the groups calling for Japanese evacuation and internment. Having adopted this position early but learning of Roosevelt's edict, the Eagle apparently viewed the Japanese relocation as a fait accompli, or soon to be, and attempted to offer a plan for blacks to benefit from the misfortune of the Japanese. Other stories in the Eagle for the four month period followed up on the "opportunity for black entrepreneurship" theme.[27]

Summary

In general, the black newspapers had a plethora of issues related to discrimination during World War II about which they could have

editorialized. A few of these issues were the segregated armed services; riots at Army training bases; a lynching in Sikeston, Missouri; the refusal of the Red Cross to accept blood from blacks; discrimination in a Detroit housing project and an ensuing riot; and discrimination against blacks in employment in defense industries and with defense contractors. Since, there were few Japanese readers of these publications, it stands to the credit of these black newspapers that they ran editorials protesting the evacuation and internment of the Japanese. At the very least, the editors of these papers were consistent in their protest of racial discrimination where they thought it existed and manifested itself. These newspapers also printed editorials supporting independence for India.

However, the major black newspapers were only one segment of the media existing during the War. To obtain a more universal picture of press performance on this issue, other studies are needed to determine the editorial stance taken by other ethnic press,i.e., Italian and German language newspapers and general circulation media, e.g., newspapers, magazines and radio stations.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Notes

[1] Robert F. Cushman, Cases in Civil Liberties, 4th ed.(Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1985) p. 252.

[2] Edwin Emery and Michael Emery. The Press in America 4th ed.(Englewood Cliffs, NJ; Prentice-Hall Inc.; 1978) p. 336.

[3] Cuushman, p. 252 and Michi Weglyn. Years of Infamy:The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps(New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1976), p. 34.

[4] James Michener in the forward of Weglyn, p. 29.

[5] Quoted in Weglyn, p. 53.

[6] Quoted in Weglyn, p. 68-69.

[7] Michener, loc. cit. Black, Clark, Fortas and Warren eventually served on the U.S. Supreme Court. Eisenhower was Associate Director of the Office of War Information and Stimson was Secretary of War under Roosevelt.

[8] See John D. Stevens, "From Behind Barbed Wire: Freedom of the Press in World War II Japanese Centers," Journalism Quarterly, 29:279-287 and Jay Friedlander, "Journalism Behind Barbed Wire, 1942-1944; An Arkansas Relocation Center Newspaper," Journalism Quarterly, 62:243-271.

[9] Roland E. Wolseley. The Black Press, U.S.A.(Ames, Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1972), p. 55.

[10] Ralph Matthews, "The Big Parade," The Afro-American, January 3, 1942, p. 4.

[11] J. Thomas Newsome, "The Drift of the Current," The Journal & Guide, February 28, 1942, p. 8.

[12] Roy Wilkins, "Watchtower," New York Amsterdam Star-News, April 25, 1942, p. 7.

[13] Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

[15]George S. Schuyler, "News and Views," The Pittsburgh Courier, December 20, 1942, p. 6.

[16]George S. Schuyler, "News and Views," The Pittsburgh Courier, April 25, 1942. p. 6.

[17]Ibid.

[18]"A Dangerous Precedent,(editorial)" The Pitsburgh Courier, April 4, 1942, p. 6.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid.

[21] "Back to the Farm?,(editorial)" The California Eagle, February 12, 1942, p. 8A.

[22] "Back to the Farm--Again, Yes!(editorial)" The California Eagle, April 30, 1942, p. 8A.

[23] Wolseley cites a Pegler column in which Pegler called the black press a group of communists. See Wolseley p. 55.

[24] "Today's Negro Newspaper Publishers are Businessmen," Ebony, November 1947, p. 47.

[25] Wolseley, p. 55. and "Criticism is Not Resented,FBI Contends," Atlanta Daily World, March 10, 1942, p. 1.

[26] "U.S.-Japs tell Loyalty to Uncle Sam," The California Eagle, January 1, 1942, p. 1.

[27]See "Business League Sees Negro Fisherman and Farmers as Result of War with Axis," California Eagle, December 18, 1941, p. 7; "Ask 'White Farmers' to take Jap Lands," The California Eagle, February 19, 1942, p. 1.; "Hey! We're Still Waiting!" The California Eagle, February 26, 1942, p. 2A; and "Race Woman Takes Over Jap Cafe," The California Eagle, April 9, 1942, p. 2A.

 BEST COPY AVAILABLE